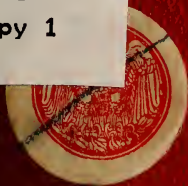


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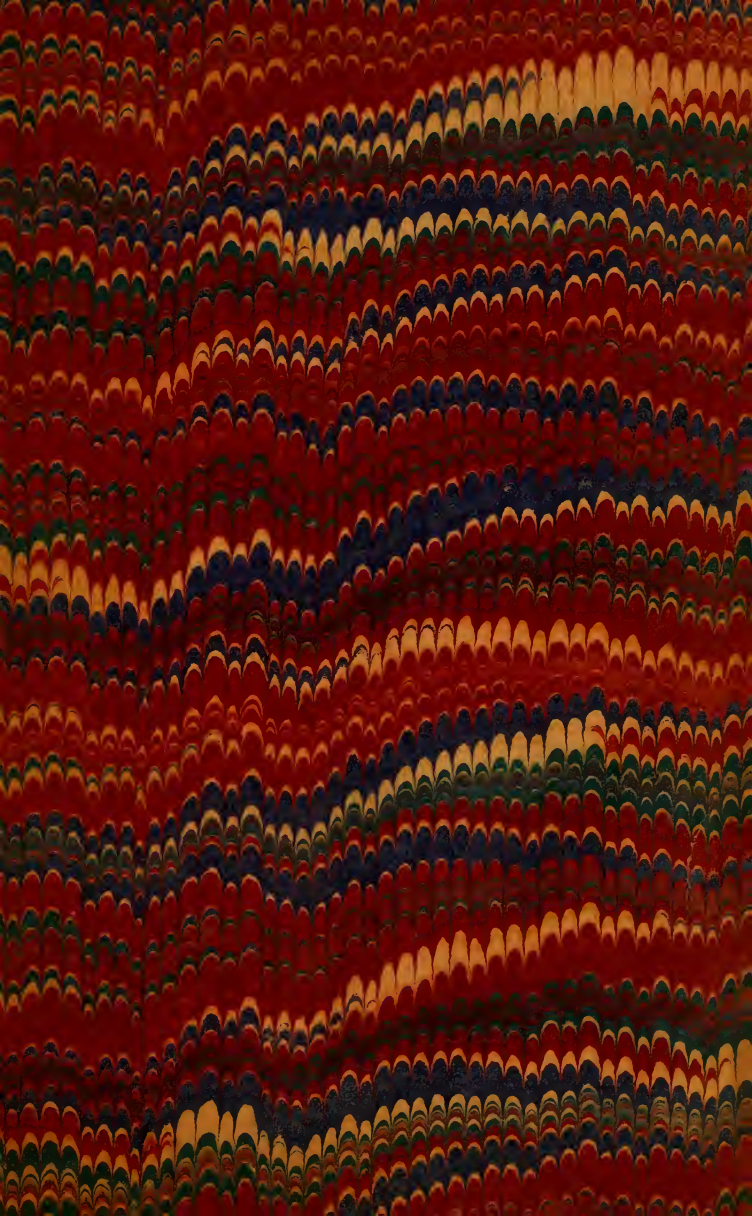


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CÆCILIA. 243

A ROMAN DRAMA.

PLAYED FOR THE FIRST TIME BY THE YOUNG LADIES OF THE
ACADEMY OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY CHILD,
AT SHARON, PA., JANUARY 31, 1865.

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Dramatis Personae.

CÆCILIA, Virgin Martyr.

AGNES, an Orphan.

EGERIA, a Roman Lady.

QUINTILIAN, Father of Cæcilia.

TIBURTIUS, her Brother.

VALERIAN, her Betrothed.

URBAN, the Pontiff.

ATHANASIUS, his Deacon.

SEPTIMIUS, A Gambler.

ALMACHIUS, Prefect of Rome.

DECIUS, an Apostate.

NIGER, a Numidian Slave.

ALEXANDER SEVERUS, the Emperor.

HERCULES MAXIMIN, his Lieutenant.

Wedding Guests, Flamens, Citizens, Guards,
Christians, Executioners, &c.

SCENE.—ROME. TIME.—REIGN OF ALEXANDER SEVERUS.

Regarding the costumes, it would be impossible to imitate correctly the dress of the age that tolerated a Heliogabalus, but the Christians ought to be more simply and humbly costumed than the others. Cæcilia and Agnes, white dresses, without any ornament whatever; Egeria, on the contrary, richly attired. For the men, consult Roman Antiquities.



CÆCILIA.

A ROMAN DRAMA.

PLAYED FOR THE FIRST TIME BY THE YOUNG LADIES OF THE
ACADEMY OF THE SISTERS OF THE HOLY CHILD
AT SHARON, PA. JANUARY 31, 1865.

ACT I.

SCENE I.—MANSION OF QUINTILIAN—CÆCILIA'S CHAMBER.

At the back, a small Altar partly concealed by curtains or tapestry. CÆCILIA, on her knees before it, sings a hymn of praise to God.

Enter AGNES.

Agnes. Cæcilia, quick! thy father!

Cæcilia. (Rising and addressing the Altar.) Shrine of hope
And boundless love! sweet comfort of my soul!
Oasis of life's desert, where, refreshed,
The weary pilgrim joyfully pursues
His course to Heav'n; and fears no more the dread
Simoom of Sin and Death. I must conceal
Thy radiance 'till that blessed day when all
Within these walls the true God shall acknowledge.

Oh, may the Bread of Life, which thou containest
My weakness strengthen.

(Draws the curtains across, concealing the Altar.)

Now, sweet Agnes, say
What errand brings my father hither, when
The Senate—if that shadow of old Rome
Deserve the title—claims his presence.

Agnes.

Ah !

Dear sister, mother, friend ! for since the day
Thou savedst me from the hands of those hard men
That orphaned me, thou hast been all to me.
Faith, strength and courage summon to thy aid ;
For never was more need of them than now.
Thy father, stung by dark Almachius' taunts,
Resolves to wed thee to the young Valerian.

Enter QUINTILIAN, unperceived.

Who will, he says, redeem thee from the shame
Of being a Christian.

Quintilian.

Yes ! the load of shame
And foul disgrace, which thou upon our house,
Rome's first and noblest, by thy creed, hast brought.
Mehercle ! how my old blood boiled to-day
Beneath that upstart's sneer. I saw, methought,
My ancestors, majestic shades around
Me hovering. Stern, reproachful looks they cast
On me, that I should have a Nazarene child.
But I have sworn this night thou shalt, must, wed
Valerian.

Cæcilia.

Father, I am Another's spouse.

Quint. Another's spouse ! What mean you ? Speak,
child, dared
You wed a Nazarene ?

Cæcilia. No, father, no.
The Rose of Sharon, He, Whose thorn-crowned head
Was bowed with weight of Love on Calvary's tree ;
Whose Sacred Heart was pierced, and Whose delight
Is ever with the sons of men to be.
Can I forget my troth to such a Spouse
As He ?

Quint. What wild thoughts, child, possess thy heart ?
Fool that I was to harbor Urban here,
When Judgment weakly bent at Pity's call.
Daughter, thy father's will must be obeyed !
Valerian shall redeem thee from the sway
Of the Crucified, and wash away our shame.

Cæcilia. The shining hosts of heaven will still be near
And in the hour of trial will protect
His spouse.

Quint. Again that name ! ungrateful child,
Forbearance shall no longer shelter thee.
A foolish, doting father have I been,
Anticipating every wish of thine ;
A mother's lost care have I tried to fill
And make thee happy. In an evil hour
Came that false Nazarene chief, and changed thee thus.
Cæcilia, spare those grey hairs, spare thy sire,
And let him not go down to Pluto's realm
Dishonored by his child. Valerian's here,
And all the wedding guests ; my promise given,

I wish to leave thee, ere my thread of life
Is severed by the Parcæ, with a kind,
Devoted husband, as thy brother goes
At once to join the Emperor in the East.

Cæcilia. Dear father! each word falls like molten lead,
Searing my soul. Oh, no! yet many years
Before thou leav'st me! Who could then supply
My loss? Thy tender love, thy constant care?
Valerian I esteem, but father, thou
Art dearer far than life. Oh, ask me not
To leave thee now.

Quint. Valerian shall remain
With thee and me here when Tiburtius leaves.
Now all is ready for the rites of Hymen!

Cæcilia. My vow! a virgin's vow! It cannot be,
Urge me not to these sacrilegious rites.
I cannot wed Valerian, and be true
To Him, who first possessed my soul.

Quint. Then hence!
Away! ungrateful child! yet stay,—no more
Thy stubborn spirit shall be conqueror. Here
It shall be crushed this instant.

(*Rushing to the door and flinging it open.*) Ho! in there!

Enter VALERIAN, TIBURTIUS, with Wedding Guests, Flamens, &c.
Friends! look on yonder disobedient child,
A slave to Christ, the Nazarene, she dares
Prefer Him to her father's love. Be thine
The work of her redemption from His sway,
Valerian. Flamen, Hymen's rites perform.

Cæcilia. Valerian, father, brother, friends ! lend not
Your countenance to this outrage. Spare me, for
I am Another's bride.

Valerian.

What ?

Quint.

Heed her not,

Some foolish Nazarene vow.

Cæcilia.

A Heavenly Spouse

Is mine, beyond conception beautiful.

Val. A Rhea Sylvia ! Pray, which god is blest ?

Cæcilia. Blaspheme Him not, Valerian. He is God.
The only God, th' Eternal, Self Existing.
He sits in majesty above the clouds,
And holds the fate of mankind in His hand.

Quint. How can a Being of such majesty
Concern Himself about th' affairs of ants
On the mole hill of this world. Our gods are like
Ourselves, and listen to our prayers ; but He,
This God, as thou portrayest Him, sits aloft,
Self-contemplating, in Immensity wrapt.
What cares He for us ?

Cæcilia.

His great love for man

Drew Him down from Immensity to dust.

Val. How canst thou call that Nazarene a God,
Whose life was lowly ; death, a malefactor's,
Who could not save Himself from death ?

Cæcilia.

His love

Incomprehensible, would die for man,

On Calvary's Tree of Life. He's my Beloved,
 And I am His. He spake, and sweetly called :
 " Arise, my love, my fair one, come to me,
 The winter's past ; the spring of grace is here."
 He poured a flood of sweetness on my soul.
 Such as your Tempe or Elysium ne'er
 Could picture to your mind. Bright, winged shapes
 And vistas of unutterable beauty flash
 Athwart my vision when I strike the lyre,
 And sing His praise. I've heard at times such strains
 Of heavenly harmony, re-echoing mine,
 As would melt demons ; thrilling, liquid tones,
 Vibrating each chord inmost of the soul.

Quint. A truce to this wild folly, now prepare
 Thy husband to receive this very night,
 Attending first with him the solemn feast
 In Juno's temple.

Cæcilia. I commend myself
 To my Beloved Spouse and angels' care
 To save me.

Val. Let us leave her to reflection.
 Perhaps Cytherea's son may plead my cause.
Cæcilia! a true, devoted heart thou spurnest,
 Whose every throb is thine ; which, cheerfully
 Would pour its life-blood drop by drop for thee.

Cæcilia. (Aside.) Dear, dear Valerian ! how my soul is rent
 Between him and whom ? God. It must not be.
 A true, devoted heart thou spurnest—— What !
 Spurn him ! Can I ? Oh Saviour of Mankind,
 Support me in this trial. *(Aloud.)* Give me time,

Valerian! father! time to call my thoughts
To judgment, where, with reason on her throne,
And feelings at the bar, perhaps the verdict
May prove a source of happiness.

Val.

Then vale!

May judgment be propitious. I will wait
Its sentence; but remember in thine hands
My destiny's placed for evil or for good.
Receive me—and my heart thou mould'st at will;
Reject me—and thou sendest through the world
A social pest, a pathless, reckless soul,
Possessed by Furies, curse to itself and all
Within its Upas shade. Forget it not,
Nay, nay, I will be thine in creed and faith
As heart, but cast me not away from thee.
My fate is trembling on thy lips; thine eyes
Diffuse in tears; thy heart swells, happy omen!
The gods have moved thee.

Cæcilia.

Ah! those words, the gods

Drive back rebellious feelings. Never can
My earthly spouse be slave to demons like them.

Tiburtius. This stubborn spirit must be broken.

I have a potent argument to bring
Thy wandering mind to reason. Listen! Here
Thou wedd'st Valerian, or the Prefect's guards
I shall conduct to Urban's place of refuge.
Last even near the Appian way I sought
A shelter from the storm, but lost my path.
Marshes and fens I plunged through, when I saw
Half hidden 'neath dense foliage and rocks,
A cavity. I forced my body through

The rugged entrance, anxious to explore
The secrets of the place, when lo ! I heard
The hum as of a multitude : a stairs
Of rock led down as if to Hades ; then
A voice rose up beneath me in the gloom,
Uttering these strange words in stranger tone :
“ I cried unto the Lord in my distress,
And from mine anguish he delivered me.”
I knew the voice, 'twas Urban's, and that cave,
His dark asylum ; Nazarenes, the crowd.
I quickly left the place unseen, and braved
Again the storm, for fearful tales I've heard
Of Christian vengeance. Sister, choose between
Thy wedding with Valerian here to-night,
Or Urban writhes to-morrow on the rack.

Cæcilia. The emperor would not suffer such a crime.

Tiburt. Turcius Almachius rules as emperor now,
Since Alexander left for Persia. Crime !
No heart hath he but what was petrified
Long since by crime. The sweetest strains to him
Are victim's groans ; his keenest bliss, their pangs.

Val. Seek not by threats, Tiburtius ! e'er to win
A bride for me ; her free choice let her have,
But harm not Urban in revenge for me.
Cæcilia ! Ah, thou'rt silent ! Then farewell !
The dream of my young life is o'er. I go
Forth on the dreary world, alone and wretched,
Oh, canst thou see me perish ? Black remorse
Shall gnaw thy breast. With thee I might win one
Of those bright names that never die, but now——

(*He is about to leave the room, when CÆCILIA rushes forward, placing her hand in his, and raising her left arm aloft.*)

Cæcilia. Where thou art, Caius, I am, Caia ! Thus
I pledge my troth. Retire, dear friends, awhile,
I have a secret for my husband's ear.

Quint. Now, thou'rt my own Cæcilia, my sweet child,
May all the gods——

Cæcilia. Thou knowest, dear father, how
Discordant grate those false names on mine ear.

Quint. Then may thy mother's shade watch o'er thee
child. [Exit QUINTILIAN.

Tiburt. Sister, thy hand ! Forgive those words of mine,
Uttered through zeal for thy true happiness.
[Exit TIBURTIUS.

Agnes. Dear sister, may the hosts of Heaven defend
Thee. Agnes ever prays for her Cæcilia.
[Exit AGNES.

WEDDING CHORUS.

Guests and Flamens :

Bright and Elysian roll o'er ye the years,
Banished be sorrow and care ;
Ne'er be th' horizon of Love dimmed with tears,
Eros reign triumphant there.
Circle the hours,
Wreathed in flowers,
Graces three, present be,
To bless this happy pair.

Come from Cytherea, fair Queen, with thy Son,
 These to thy sway are won,
 These, these to thy sway are won.

[*Exeunt Guests and Flamens.*]

Cæcilia. Valerian, spouse, there is a heavenly spirit,
 Winged with light, my guardian. He it was
 That whispered to my soul: "Espouse Valerian,
 And thou shalt be his saviour, under God,
 And he, disciple." (*Draws back the curtains from the Altar.*)

Lo! my secret shrine!

Where I commune with Him, of whom I spoke,
 The Heavenly Bridegroom.

Val.

He! my rival?

Cæcilia.

No.

He wants thee for His friend. Oh! kneel with me,
 And let thy heart but breathe the wish, and thou
 Shalt know Him.

Val. Cease, dear spouse, these idle fancies.
 How can I, scion of Rome, bow down to Him,
 A Jewish malefactor? Yet I am
 Desirous still to know Him.

Cæcilia.

Kneel with me

Before this shrine. (*They kneel.*) Pour down thy grace,
 O Lord!

On this benighted soul, and show him here

Thyself. (*VALERIAN falls prostrate before the Altar.*)

Valerian! husband! speak to me. (*Rushing to the door.*)

Ho! father, friends, help!

Enter QUINTILIAN, TIBURTIUS, AGNES, *Guests and Flamens.*

Quint. Daughter, what is this ?
Why lies Valerian still ?

Val. (Rising.) The Lord hath spoken !
Mine eyes have seen His glory. Blessed be
His name for ever. Praise Him ! praise Him, all !

Quint. Valerian, speak, what means this ?

Val. Streams of light
Deluge my soul with bliss unspeakable,
A yearning strange but tender fills my heart,
Hark !

CHORUS OF UNSEEN SPIRITS.

Welcome, youth, within our fold,
Where taste joys, unseen, untold.
Seeking Urban's grotto first,
Quench in draughts of Faith thy thirst.
Then in blood that Faith be sealed,
Ere to thee Heaven be revealed.

*(All sink on their knees, with heads bent
down, and hands clasped.)*

Joy ! the potent spell of Grace,
Moves each heart, illumines each face ;
Joy ! poor souls, to Heaven won,
Bask ye in the Heavenly Sun.
In the warm blood of the Lamb,
Grasp ye soon the martyr's palm.

*(Chorus melts away in the distance, as the
Scene gradually closes.)*

SCENE II.—MANSION OF QUINTILIAN—THE ATRIUM.

NIGER *discovered, sitting on the Atriensis's seat, in the centre.*

Niger. It has often occurred to me what an unaccountable mistake Nature committed in making me a slave instead of an emperor, general, or even politician. Although, I must certainly thank her for having exempted me from the disgrace of being the last of these three human vultures. Why, the good old lady, with all due respect, must have been napping, nay, slightly inebriated, at the time she placed an ambitious soul, acquisitive beyond limit, and a cunning intellect, in this dusky breast, and made it the footstool of another. Now, the brilliant talents for intrigue and knavery which I modestly claim to possess in the highest degree, should make me the envied and admired of Rome. Only think of it! What general ever carried a stronghold with more skill than I did the wine cellar the other night, giving in the dark its keeper a gentle tap on the skull with his own keys, and sympathizing with him the next day when I met him with his head bandaged. Hercules! what a story he told Quintilian and the household, how a dozen armed men burst on him in the cellar and succeeded, after a desperate struggle, in binding him hand and foot while they proceeded to their work of pillage. The pillage was confined to broaching an amphora of wine, and the dozen men, your humble servant. He he was so drunk, (or at least the keys did not agree with his soft skull,) that he never suspected me. How dexterously I removed the atriensis with a flagon of the same wine diluted with a little poppy juice, and left him lying across Quintilian's path, as it were, dead drunk. He was sent at once to work in the marshes, and I was promoted

to his post. I wonder what on earth has come over those individuals, father and son, whose property I am. Coming through the vestibule this morning I met the old man, and he desired me to carry a letter to Metellus, his kinsman, who lives, you know, on the Appian Way, next door to——well! no matter. His ordinary mode of addressing me is: "Take this letter, thou lazy, good-for-nothing, graceless knave, and if it is not at its destination in a few minutes, a whip of scorpions shall make thy back tingle." Now this is the usual form, the proper *vale*, but what do you think he said: "Good Niger, carry this letter to Metellus, and take these sesterces as reward." I looked at the man as if he had lost his senses: I felt quite offended at his familiarity and departed without saying a word. And Tiburtius, whom I met at the Capena Gate, instead of his usual blow and imprecation, to which I was entitled by long custom, also asked me in a quiet, lamb-like tone, to carry another letter to an old gardiner that lives near the Via Ardeatina. What on earth has moved them? I have it! Eureka! The old gardiner is a Christian and I believe Metellus is no better. I have not delivered the letters, as both parties to whom they were directed have fled to avoid Almachius's vengeance. Here they are. (*Produces two rolls of papyrus.*) It is a very lucky thing my master has permitted me to learn to read, or I could not gain so many secrets as I have. (*Unrolls one of the letters and reads.*)

"QUINTILIAN to METELLUS, *greeting*: The light of Faith hath shone o'er this house, the bonds of our souls are broken. Haste to me, brother in Christ, and let us commune together."

A Christian! Well, whoever would have told me that the stern old Quintilian should become a Christian, or bend his knee to anything, I would have laughed at the idea, and gently intimated to my informant that he was lying ——— under a great mistake. (*Unrolls the second letter.*) Now to see what the fiery young Tiburtius says: Mercy! worse than the father! (*Reads.*)

“TIBURTIUS to PAUL, *greeting*: Await me to-night at thy garden on the Via Ardeatina. I have much to tell thee. Grace, through the prayers of Cæcilia, is poured abundantly on all our hearts. Valerian and I will seek Urban with thee to-night.”

Ha! ha! ha! The cynical, profligate noble, too! I wish I could find a liberal purchaser for these two pieces of parchment. Now for my own prospects. Christians are easily gulled; they bite at the bait of seeming virtue. What, then, is the difficulty in my gaining the confidence of my master by pretending to be a most honest rogue, and keep a sharp eye and light fingers for any stray sesterces. (*Enter SEPTIMIUS, behind.*) Ah! the sesterces! the sesterces! There's my weak point, there the vulnerable heel of this Achilles.

Septimius. (*Advancing and clapping him on the shoulder.*) Indeed! wouldst thou like then to earn some of these sesterces?

Niger. Quite an unnecessary question, I assure you, sir. What's the work?

Sept. Very light. Merely to exchange dress with me and allow me to take thy place here to-night.

Niger. Very light, certainly, for you, I suppose, but the scourging consequent on discovery would be very heavy for me.

Sept. Not the slightest danger. Will thy mistress pass through the atrium to-day ?

Niger. Yes.

Sept. Quintilian and his son will not return to-night ?

Niger. No.

Sept. Well, then, fifty sesterces for thy place ? No ? Then one hundred ?

Niger. (*Aside.*) I wonder what villainy he meditates. All Rome knows Septimius to be a rascal of the first water. I'll pump him ! (*Aloud.*) Well, it is a very delicate matter, besides the risk and my character.

Sept. Thy character, unconscionable knave ! There can be no risk, as I can personate thee successfully. Observe ! my skin is stained as dark as thine.

Niger. But master has given strict orders not to allow any of your worthy confraternity, especially yourself, inside these doors.

Sept. My confraternity ! What means he, knave ? I am as noble as he.

Niger. That may be, but, he says, you are a distinguished member of the dice confraternity, instituted for the purpose of relieving spendthrifts and verdant youths of their sesterces ; in fact, a sort of branch of the light-fingered persuasion.

Sept. 'Tis false! Well, then, thou rejectest my offer. I will make it two hundred?

Niger. (*Aside.*) I must first discover what plot's in view. (*Aloud.*) But, suppose, some of the household should discover you. Since my mistress went to Brundusium——

Sept. Villian, liar! Hast thou not told me she will pass through the atrium to-day?

Niger. Certainly, she has returned from Brundusium.

(*Aside.*) I see his drift now, an interview.

Sept. That is sufficient. Thy dress?

Niger. Your chances, my friend, are rather slim in that quarter.

Sept. Peace, knave! Thou knowest not my errand. 'Tis different.

Niger. Oh, of course. I only wish to tell you that Valerian and my young mistress were married last night.

Sept. (*Aside.*) Married last night! Then all my hopes are over. I thought the knowledge I had of her being a Christian might terrify her into becoming my bride. But I shall be avenged. Almachius shall be informed of her Nazarene proclivities, and she shall appear before his tribunal. Perhaps she has renounced them. She would not wed Valerian and remain a Christian.

Niger. You are mistaken there, friend. There's a secret about the matter.

Sept. What is it ? what is it ?

Niger. You may be a very smart young man, but you have come to the wrong quarter for gratuitous news.

Sept. How much is thy secret worth ?

Niger. Ah ! that's business. I like to hear a man talk common sense. It reminds me of a little story——

Sept. Cease thy babbling, and answer me.

Niger. You lost a good story there. I'd throw it in gratis. Besides, there's a joke attached to it.

Sept. To business, knave !

Niger. Well, then, you pay me two hundred sesterces for the honorable privilege of representing me on this seat. I'd prefer a more respectable representative, but we'll pass that over. People's representatives are not always faithful types of them.

Sept. By Hades ! thou art worse than a monkey for chattering. Thy secret and price ?

Niger. A libel ! I am proverbially taciturn. My secret is worth five hundred.

Sept. What a gourmand for money ! Dost take me for a Cræsus or a Midas ?

Niger. No, but for a particular favorite of blind Plutus, to serve whom I am risking a journey to Pluto. These letters (*producing them*) contain proofs of my secret.

Sept. Well, then, take this purse ; thy demand is con-

tained in it. First, now, thy dress ? (NIGER *throws off his tunic or blouse ; they exchange cloaks.*) Thy hat ? (NIGER *crushes it down on SEPTIMIUS's head.*) Insolent slave ! I'll teach thee manners !

Niger. Nothing like expedition. Excuse my excess of zeal in your cause.

Sept. Thy excess of presumption ! Thy secret and those letters now !

Niger. My master and his son, with the newly wedded pair, are Christians.

Sept. What ! Quintilian, Valerian, Tiburtius ? Impossible ! Thou mockest me, slave !

Niger. Excuse me, friend, you are slave now. Here are proofs (*handing the letters to him*).

Sept. (Reads.) "QUINTILIAN to METELLUS, *greeting* : The light of Faith hath shone o'er this house ; the bonds of our souls are broken. Haste to me, brother in Christ, and let us commune together."

Excellent ! Io triumphe ! (*Reads.*)

"TIBURTIUS to PAUL, *greeting* : Await me to-night at thy garden on the Via Ardeatina. I have much to tell thee. Grace, through the prayers of Cæcilia, is poured abundantly on all our hearts. Valerian and I will seek Urban with thee to-night."

Better, better. I shall snare the whole covey. Thy secret and letters are invaluable. Thanks for them !

Niger. (Holding up purse.) Sesterces for them are better.

(*Aside.*) What a fool I was not to demand more ; I let them go too easily. (*Aloud.*) Could you not make some addition to this purse in consideration of the letters ?

Sept. Thou art a perfect Charybdis of avarice. Hence ! and await me at the baths of Caracalla.

Niger. (*Aside.*) I must make the most of the little time allotted to me as a gentleman. (*To Sept.*) *Vale*, friend substitute, I hope you will pass inspection. It is not always we can get a substitute for nothing, and bounty from him in the bargain. [*Exit NIGER.*]

Sept. Christians ! father, husband, brother, all ! and here the proofs. Ha ! my pretty bird, I shall cage thee now, and have revenge besides. Valerian's spouse. Yes, thou shalt soon have a mangled corse as husband. Softly, softly, I must proceed with caution. Ha ! here comes a fitting tool ; the fair Egeria, seeking her truant Valerian, I'll warrant. [*Retires up the stage.*]

Enter EGERIA.

Egeria. I feel as one possessed by Furies, since That knell of love, Valerian's marriage, fell With boding cadence on mine ear. Cæcilia ! Quintilian's daughter, she *his* bride ! My heart Like Ariadne's on the strand of Samos, Deserted, bends beneath its weight of woe. Why should he trifle with me thus ? That night When first we met in Juno's temple, how His burning eloquence entranced my soul, Although a mere spectator ! Rome, his theme, That vast crowd swayed like willows in the wind. He spoke of Rome's past glory, and the shades

Of Tully and stern Brutus seemed to nod
 Approval. That Antinous' form I saw,
 When next we met here at Quintilian's feast.
 Those honeyed words, attentions, what are they,
 But Dead Sea fruits that turn to ashes now!
 And yet what brings me here? This is her house.
 Some wild resolve, I know not what——

Sept.

Revenge.

Egeria. (*Turning round hastily and perceiving him.*)
 Eaves-dropping slave!

Sept.

Yet one who can befriend
 Thee, and thy truant win back to thy sway.

Egeria. Thou canst? How? Speak, and name thy terms.

Sept.

To-morrow.

Await Cæcilia in her garden, when
 At night she takes her usual walk, and there
 Urge every argument thou canst invent—
 Falsehood or truth.

Egeria.

Against her marriage?

Sept.

Yes,

She is a Christian. Tell her that her spouse,
 Valerian, thine by right forsook thee for her.

Egeria. She will not credit it.

Sept.

Then threaten.

Egeria.

Her?

Sept. Valerian is a Christian, too.

Egeria.

'Tis false,

Sept. Quintilian also and his son.*Egeria.*

What, slave!

Thou mockest! Rome's three noblest——

Sept.

Yet they bent

To Christ. Believe me, lady. I have proofs.

Threaten Cæcilia with Almachius' vengeance,

And she must yield Valerian up to thee.

Egeria. Who art thou, slave, that plottest thus?*Sept.*

A slave,

But one that thirsts for vengeance.

Egeria.

Why?

Sept.

No matter,

A slave has wrongs.

Egeria.

How can I trust thee, slave?

Sept. I risk much in admitting thee to-night,

A scourging, perhaps death. Thou knowest the law.

Egeria. My mind, irresolute, misgives me.*Sept.*

Then

Valerian with his bride leaves Rome at once,

When he returns; to-morrow he'll be absent,

Thy interview may gain its end, and then

He's thine. If she consents not, still, fear not,

She never shall be his.

Egeria.

What canst thou do?

A slave?

Sept. I have a means infallible
To separate them. Trust me, it is one
That never yet has failed.

Egeria. Thou dost not mean
Aught harm against Valerian. I'd be first
Thee to denounce. His life is wrapt in mine ;
Touch him, and thou shall find me Nemesis.

Sept. Valerian's life, I pledge, is safe from me,
Are there not other means to place a gulf
Between them ? Dark Suspicion, Jealousy,
And all their train of demons withering
The hopes and joys of wedlock with their breath.
Knowest thou not circumstances which can tear
The trusting heart from Confidence's throne,
And make it spy, nay, tyrant where it loved,
And thou a woman ? Out upon thee.

Egeria. Cease,
Enough. Valerian must be mine, or else
Cæcilia dies ; I could not tamely brook
Her triumph. Gain him for me, I am rich,
And can reward thee what thou wilt. I shall
Await her in the garden, where my cause
I'll plead with more than Tullian eloquence.
But mark me, slave ! Beware my vengeance if
Valerian suffer aught from thee. Beware !

[*Exit* EGERIA.]

Sept. Poor, silly child ! weak instrument of mine !
I spare Valerian ! No, those eyes shall gloat
Upon his racked limbs. Ate ! that foul insult,
That stinging blow he gave me at the Baths

For taunting him about a trifle must
 Be washed away in blood, *his* blood, by Hades !
 And old Quintilian, too ! Tiburtius ! ah,
 How each shall pay me for their haughty scorn.
 Dread Ate, I'm thy slave. Come, Nemesis,
 But one bold stroke and fair Cæcilia's mine. [Exit.

SCENE III.—ENTRANCE TO THE BATHS OF CARACALLA.

*Crowds passing to and fro. Enter SEPTIMIUS, muffled in a cloak.
 He conceals himself partly behind a pillar near the footlights.*

Septimius. 'Tis now the hour : he should be here ; my
 soul

Is like a fire-girt scorpion, in th' embrace
 Of Ate. Ha ! Cæcilia, I shall see
 Thee yet petitioner at my feet. Thy scorn
 And his, Valerian's insult, shall be paid
 In blood—in his and thine ! My heart shall gloat
 O'er his distorted face and rack'd limbs rent
 With agony. And when thy dainty form
 Is quivering on that rack, I'll whisper thee
 Such consolation as will make thee writhe
 In keener torture. Had he but delayed
 Last night one minute later, thou wert mine.
 I would have carried thee far, far from him.
 A trusty band was there ; she—seized ; slaves—fled,
 When rushed Valerian on us ; in an instant
 Three of the band lay gasping ; she was torn
 Away from me ; the coward knaves then shrank
 In terror from him, though I urged them on.
 In vain. A throng of armed slaves soon came,

I'll tame or crush him and his cursed brood.
 Watch well the quarry; bind him fast, spare not
 If he resists, but crush him like a worm.

[*Exit* ALMACHIUS.]

Sept. Oh, what a glorious helpmate! Thanks, ye gods!
 For giving him to me. He's one who will
 My vengeance glut e'en to repletion. How
 Our silly emperor mistook him, when
 He left him in his place to govern Rome.
 My galley leaves, then, for the Euxine Sea
 To-night when my revenge is taken; if
 The fair Cæcilia lives she shall leave too,
 And be my slave.

(*During the above, the people have all entered the Baths,
 so that none remain but the Soldiers and SEPTIMIUS.*)

(*Addressing the Guards*): Conceal yourselves, until
 I give the signal; then rush in and seize
 Whom I shall point out; harm him not, but quickly
 Convey him to the Mamertine, and cast him
 Into the deepest dungeon there. Retire.

[*Exeunt Guards.*]

Here comes the quarry. How I hate him, but
 I'll play him as the tiger does his prey.

— *Enter* VALERIAN.

Sept. Good evening, fair sir; may I offer thee,
 Though tardy, my congratulations on
 Thy late, successful wooing, and thy triumph,
 With Hymen's aid, o'er obdurate Cæcilia.
 Although not present on that happy night,
 I feel an interest in the nuptials, which

Induced me to accost thee thus: I hope
Thou wilt be happy with thy bride.

Valerian.

Indeed?

I must feel flattered when Septimius offers
Congratulations; such from him, I deem
An insult.

Sept. Ha! ha! ha! our friend is cholerick
Thou art ungrateful: for I've labored hard
To make thee fitting presents on thy bridal;
Thou'lt find them equal to my zeal for thee;
A bridal chamber, such as ne'er thou dreamed of
Is now prepared for thy reception.

Val. (Aside.)

Oh!

His sneering smile doth put to flight
My resolutions of humility.
The hot blood of our race is boiling up
And coursing madly through my veins. Oh God!
This fiery spirit's conqueror. I'm lost
(*Aloud.*) Thy prating insolence deserves return
Such as I once administered before.
Beware, I may again chastise the cur
That bays me. Keep thy presents for the class
Of Harpies foul to which thou dost belong.

Sept. A poor return for my good wishes: still
My interest in thy bridal causes me
To overlook it.

Val.

Truly condescending!

I have not time to listen to thy sneers,
Thou hast some hidden purpose: I can see it,

But care for thee and all thy plots as much
As if thou wert some buzzing fly ; whene'er
It's troublesome I brush it off.

Sept. So then,
Thou wilt reject the offer made by friends,
Dear friends of thine—a beauteous bridal chamber.
They have empowered me to use some force,
Friendly, of course, persuading thy acceptance.

Val. (*Drawing his sword.*) Thy insolence is such I cannot pass.

Sept. Ho ! in there ! (*Enter Guards, on all sides.*)
On him, fellows, he's your victim !

(*VALERIAN, after a brief struggle, is thrown on the ground, disarmed and pinioned. They raise him on his feet, holding him by the arms.*)

Sept. Why brush not off these buzzing flies that are
So troublesome ? Valerian, thou art caged :
I have a rare treat for thee in return
For last month's stinging blow upon these steps.

Val. Coward ! unbind one arm, but one, and dare
To meet me here amid thy myrmidons.
Place in my hand my trusty sword, and then
Array thy paltry skin in armor ; load
Thyself with all the weapons thou canst wield
And dare to venture near my reach.

Sept. Ha ! ha !
Thou shouldst have been a gladiator : how
That speech would tell within the amphitheatre.

I'm sorry that thy amiable intentions
Cannot be gratified. Now, to explain.
Some worthy friend of thine has fitted up
A private chamber, as I said, for thee.
This guard of honor will conduct thee there.
Beneath the walls of Mamertine it lies,
The yellow Tiber rushes o'er its roof.
The walls are not o'er dry, and darkness reigns
Impenetrable ; thou shalt have companions ;
I would not have thee solitary : there
Are toads and hissing snakes enough to keep
Thy mind diverted from its loneliness.
Hast thou no thanks for this, *my* friendly care ?
Dost hear ?

Val. I do and see a hissing viper
More hideous than aught created ; nay,
I libel Nature when I liken thee
To any work of hers. She had no hand
In cursing Earth with such a foul abortion
As thou. On, fellows, lead me to my fate,
I've dared grim Death before against the foes
Of Rome, and looked him boldly in the face
Too often e'er to tremble here. Lead on !
Let not my eyes be cursed with such a loathsome
Object as him.

Sept. Friend, tarry yet awhile !
I have not told thee half the bliss in store
For thee. The bridal chamber where to-night
Thou'lt meet Cæcilia and her father, is
Almachius' torture-chamber, furnished well
With curious instruments, attentive slaves,
A couch with rollers, wheels and loops, in which

Thy wrists and ancles will be fastened ; there
Thou'lt see thy bride, her features rent with pain.
Ha ! ha ! thou wincest now.

Val. (*Struggling with the Guards.*) Inhuman wretch !
How has that angel harmed thee ? What pretext
Canst thou adduce to make the prefect party
To such an outrage ?

Sept. Ye are Nazarenes.
I hold the proofs.

Val. The emp'ror will exact
Dread retribution, when he hears what crimes
Have been committed in his name. I have
His autograph : Almachius dare not slight it.

Sept. Try him, then, silly fool, Almachius dares
More than thou knowest : he is emperor now.

Val. Heaven fend such evil dire to Rome.
Thou liest : Alexander shall return.

Sept. Perhaps : he'll not find thee to welcome him.

Val. Vent all thy malice on my body, but
Harm not Cæcilia. Tear my limbs with all
Thy instruments of torture, but in mercy,
If thou art human, spare my gentle bride.

Sept. Thy bride ! that name's her knell ! Enough,
thou'lt see
Her dainty form, there writhing on the rack
Thou'lt hear her piteous groans : yet listen well.
She shall not die : no, no, that must not be.

I'll have physicians who will care her well,
And bring her back to life and health, but mar
To be my slave, my minion.

Val. God of Mercy!
Who called my soul from outer darkness, can
This demon here pollute with his foul shadow
Thy glorious sun above us shining? Can
Such deeds be done, and thou sit still? Send down
Thy bolts to scorch yon plague spot of Creation.
Earth, open wide thy breast and drag him down
From man's society.

Sept. Thy words are music.
Go on. I shall not interrupt thy strain.

Val. Men, soldiers, can ye thus degrade your race?
Can Romans sink so low from their high name
As to become the tools of such a fiend?

Sept. These men are Syrians and thy eloquence
Is lost on them.

Val. Thank Heaven then I'm spared
The pang of seeing Romans tools of thine.
Lead on, there is a God of Justice, who
Weighs all things rightly.

Sept. Hence with him!

(*VALERIAN is led off. He turns back, when he reaches the door,
and exclaims*): Beware!

When next we meet. [*Exit, with Guards.*]

Sept. A chill glides o'er my frame
Beneath that haunting eye. What folly's this?

Septimius, thou art growing womanish.
 Why tremblest thou with Nemesis thy friend?
 Now for the second act of Vengeance' drama.
 'Tis nigh the fair Egeria's hour: she will,
 I trust, accomplish her share of my work,
 And raise tormenting doubts, suspicions dark,
 In proud Cæcilia's mind about her spouse.
 By Hades! Ate, I will sacrifice
 Some suckling babe to thee for aiding me. [Exit SEPT.

Enter NIGER, from behind the steps of the Bath, where he was lying.

Niger. (*After looking cautiously around.*) Well, now, if that last gentleman isn't as pretty a specimen of a first-class villain as ever the walls of Rome sheltered, I'm not Niger, but Julius Cæsar. I ought to feel honored in having a substitute of such superior abilities. He will be our next emperor: I know it. Many a breast the imperial purple has covered less deserving. Such abilities make me envious. But, Mr. Septimius, you forgot that this wasn't paid for yet, so here goes to warn Quintilian and his family of Almachius' surprise party. [Exit, singing

Ho! ho! the sesterces, sesterces for me,
 With them there's Elysium; without, misery.

SCENE IV.—QUINTILIAN'S GARDENS—ARBOR AND SEATS—EGERIA DISCOVERED.

Egeria. The slave must have deceived me, or she would Have come ere this. A footstep—hist! she comes.
 Oh, how her hated beauty, gentle air,
 And Vestal countenance doth madden me.

[Retires behind a tree.

Enter CÆCILIA.

Cæcilia. How sweet the recompense that God has given
 For those heart-burning tribulations past,
 When darkness more intense than Egypt's reigned,
 And Satan claimed allegiance from this house.
 My little lamp of Faith oft flickered, but
 Daily I trimmed it at my shrine; now light
 Illumes each soul, and shows it its true God.
 Father and brother won to Him; my spouse,
 Valerian, too! what joy and bliss I feel.
 But last night's scene, those wicked men that sought
 To drag me from him, oh! 'twas Satan's work.
 Valerian saved me, yet methought I saw
 The flash of seraph wings above my head.
 My captor saw it, too, and shrank dismayed.
 I've tended those poor wretches carefully,
 Whose breasts were gashed wide by Valerian's sword:
 The rest, my father, at my earnest prayer,
 Dismissed unharmed. I feel a holy joy,
 As though 'twere Eden in this garden. Oh!
 How bright my nuptials seem, a radiant vision,
 A dream of Heav'n. May clouds obscure them not;
 And may no serpent curse this Paradise.

Egeria. (*Coming forward.*) Will not the thought of
 others' misery given
 As price for thy bright dream a serpent prove
 To sting thee with remorse? Shall not the clouds
 Of others' lost hopes dim it?

Cæcilia. Stranger, why
 These words ill-omened? why thy angered air?

Egeria. (*Throwing back her veil.*) Thou knowest why now, perhaps.

Enter SEPTIMIUS, unperceived, in NIGER's dress.

Cæcilia. Egeria here!

Egeria. Why not, when thou wouldst leave me desolate?

Cæcilia. I!!

Egeria. Yes, thou smiling hypocrite!

Cæcilia.

Egeria.

I have ne'er wronged a creature knowingly,
But rather would I die ten thousand deaths
Than thou shouldst suffer aught harm at my hands.

Egeria. Hast thou not wed Valerian?

Cæcilia.

Can that be

A wrong?

Egeria. A wrong! Yes, one the deepest thou
Couldst e'er have done me. He was mine.

Cæcilia.

Thine?

Egeria.

Yes,

Before thy spells enthralled him. Listen. Long
He owned my sway: his presence was the star
Of my young life. Thou shalt resign him.

Cæcilia.

What!

My spouse? Impossible!

Egeria. (*Drawing a dagger, and rushing on her.*) Then
die!

Septimius. (*Rushing between them and grasping Egeria's wrist, so that the dagger falls.*) (*Aside to Egeria.*) Is this Thy argument? Away! I'll plead thy cause. Fear not, she shall not sever thee from him.

[*Exit EGERIA.*]

Cæcilia. Can such fell passions sway the breast of woman?
Good Niger, has Valerian yet returned?

Sept. (*Aside.*) Valerian! how I hate that name.
(*Aloud in a feigned voice.*) I fear
My lady, I have sad news.

Cæcilia. What? Oh, speak!
My husband! Has aught happened him?

Sept. Be calm,
It can be remedied. He's in the hands
Of enemies, who know not mercy; foes
Who've sworn his death.

Cæcilia. What foes could meditate
Aught wrong 'gainst such as him?

Sept. No matter, still
He's in the Mamertine to-night; no more
Expect to see him living.

Cæcilia. Oh! good Niger,
Unsay those cruel words, what has he done
To merit death so young, so noble?

Sept. Much.
He has betrayed thee into marriage, when

His troth was plighted to Egeria ; and
He's proved a traitor double-dyed to Rome,
At least his intercepted messages
To her worst foes assert so.

Cæcilia. Never! Guile
 Could find no place in my Valerian's breast,
 No more than dross in virgin gold. He's armed
 In honor's mail 'gainst all corruption. Cease
 Thy charges, for they fall like blunted darts,
 When aimed at his fair name.

Sept. Thy eloquence,
I fear, will not avail him much : he's doomed.
His guilt is clear, thou must give way to proofs.
Read well these intercepted letters, and (*producing them*)
They'll prove him false to Rome and thee.

Cæcilia. (*Rejecting them.*) Away!

I'll hear no more against my husband. If
All Rome were clamoring charges, heaping proofs
And bringing witnesses against Valerian;
If in the judgment of the world he stood
Arraigned, condemned, disgraced, he still is mine,
My noble spouse unblemished. Earth and Hell
Can ne'er dethrone him in my heart: nay, more,
If one of those bright seraphs—(were it so
They thus could fall in sin)—should whisper me
That my Valerian's not the noblest soul
In Rome; that aught could draw him from the path
Of honor: I'd reject his tale with horror.

Sept. (*Aside.*) Her faith in him is adamantine. Now,
To work, upon that faith. (*Aloud.*) Thou hast a chance
To show thy love now—rescue him from death.

Cæcilia. What can a poor, weak woman do ?

Sept.

I know

A way to reach him. Come with me to-night,
And he shall leave the gloomy Mamertine.

Cæcilia. (*Departing.*) My Father or Tiburtius I will seek
To aid us in this work.

Sept. (*Stepping between her and the door.*) It must be done,
By us alone. I have grave reasons for it.

Cæcilia. I must consult them first.

Sept.

They must not know

One word. Come, let's depart at once before
The time for action's past.

Cæcilia.

I cannot leave

The house to-night without my father's knowledge.

Sept. Thou shalt, by Hades !

Cæcilia.

Niger ! thou forgettest

Thy place : Retire or I will summon them.

Sept. Disguise to Tartarus ! Proud dame, perhaps
This face may be familiar.

(*Tearing away his false beard and throwing off his skull-cap.*)

Ha ! thy face

Is blanched.

Cæcilia. Septimius ! Heaven guard me !

Sept.

Pray,

For thou hast need of all the gods to help thee,

And all Olympus. I've not time to tell thee
 What is in store for thee and thy curs'd spouse.
 Let this suffice. E'en now he's on the rack
 On charge of being a Christian; thy turn next
 This very night, unless thou leavest with me.
 My galley's ready, but consent to fly
 With me as mine, and thou art safe: refuse,
 And all the torments of Christ's hell are mild
 To what thou'lt suffer in Almachius' hands,
 Turn not thine eyes on me for mercy to him,
 I've sworn his death, and tracked him to it. Yes,
 Too late, he's on the Stygian shore e'en now.
 Will 'thou consent? Thou art in my power! Quick!

Cæcilia. Forsake not, Lord, thy neophyte Valerian.
 He's but a child in Faith. Is any spark
 Of human feeling in thy murderous heart,
 Septimius, that thou shouldst deface the work
 Of God in him. I have no thought for life
 Without him; gladly will I hail the hour
 Of union with my God and him in Heaven.

Sept. No, no, thou shalt not join him yet. I'll have
 More exquisite revenge than death. This night
 A gentle application of the rack
 Will tame thee. Thou art my slave and minion, long
 Thou'lt fawn upon me at my feet, but all
 The rest of thy curs'd race shall die.

Cæcilia. Great God!
 Record not this man's malice, he's possessed
 By some foul fiend.

Sept. 'Tis Nemesis compels me!

Thou hast no time to lose. Hark ! hear you now
 The tramp of soldiers' feet outside. Hence, fool,
 Thou shalt be mine. *(Seizes her by the wrist.)*

Enter VALERIAN, hastily, his face covered with blood, his garments torn and dripping. NIGER follows with a large club. VALERIAN grasps SEPTIMIUS by the throat and hurls him to the ground, where he lies stunned and helpless. NIGER binds him.

Cæcilia. (Joyfully taking VALERIAN by both hands.) Valerian, my own spouse,
 The God of Mercy has now heard my prayer,
 And thou art safe—yet no, these wounds, that blood,
 Thy haggard face.

Valerian. (Speaking rapidly.) Fear not, my wounds are slight
 Though many. There's no time to lose. The thought
 Of thy great peril gave me giant strength.
 They led me near the Tiber on the way
 To prison ; with an effort which Alcides
 Could scarce have made I freed my pinioned arms,
 Hurl'd the two nearest from me, snatch'd an axe
 That lay near, hewed my way to Tiber's banks,
 Plunged in, and thus escaped them. This brave fellow
 Rescued me when the loss of blood would soon
 Have sent me to the bottom. When we reached
 The shore we lay for some time still, and heard
 My captors searching for me ; it was dark,
 And God conceal'd me. When they left we ran
 With all speed possible to have thee warn'd.
 Thy father and Tiburtius have gone
 To-day to visit Urban ; they are safe.
 Now for escape, quick, quick, the time is short.

May God restrain this fiery breast of mine,
And cool the lava in my veins.

Niger. I think we had better make this gentleman effect an instant change of base before we fix upon a way of avoiding his friends.

Val. Very well, good Niger, take him away. He's senseless. My temper and anger at witnessing his cruel treatment of thee, Cæcilia, half betrayed me into lulling him to the sleep that is without waking.

Niger. I've the other half of the intention necessary to send him to Pluto. You send him half-way, and I'll warrant with this club he'll reach his destination in Tartarus (I beg the lady's pardon, as she's a Christian), in hell, without any stoppage on the way.

Cæcilia. No, no, Valerian, leave him to God. Wouldst thou send the poor wretch before his Judge unrepenting? I'll pray for him unceasingly, and perhaps there may be a place in Heaven for him.

Niger. He'd be an addition certainly. I'm afraid, my lady, all the saints and angels would soon send in a petition to expel him. He's a hard shell.

Val. Carry him to the house, and leave him where his worthy *confreres* will find him.

Niger. (*Lifting the body of SEPTIMIUS, and dragging it away.*) He's only playing possum, sir. Depend upon it, he has his wits in order now. However, I'll secure him.

[*Exit NIGER, with body.*]

Val. We have not an instant to lose. Almachius and his satellites will be here. Which way can we leave this garden?

Cæcilia. Thanks to Heaven, we're saved. (*Kneeling on the ground she raises a trap-door.*) This secret passage leads into a cave from which we can reach the Via Ardeatina. This house and gardens once belonged to a Prefect, who made this passage as a precaution against adversity and enemies. Urbân, our Holy Father, informed me of its existence, and memory now, like Heaven's inspiration, recalled it to my mind. We can easily find the entrance to the Catacombs when we leave this passage.

(*Sounds of voices and clash of arms heard.*)

Enter NIGER, running.

Niger. They've come—the Prefect and a manipie of soldiers; so we had better be making ourselves scarce as soon as possible. Hallo! what have you there? an underground railroad? Good! I'm partial to such institutions. The Ethiopians south of us——

Val. Time presses, so waste it not in words. Where left you Septimius?

Niger. Well, he's not far off, I assure you. I had not dragged him but a short distance when I heard the approach of the soldiers. My burden heard it, too, for he jumped up, or rather was jumping up, when I administered him a gentle reproof for his vivacity, with this club.

Cæcilia. Did you injure him much?

Niger. Oh no, my lady, not much; only something

cracked and it wasn't the stick. He lay down like a lamb and I left him in a gentle but sound slumber.

Val. Come, Cæcilia, descend first and we will follow.
(CÆCILIA descends by the trap-door, VALERIAN following.)

Val. Come, Niger.

Niger. All aboard, sir. Go ahead. I hope we'll meet no obstructions on the track. If we do, I'll remove them with my stick. Good morning, Squire Almachius and Lawyer Septimius, I'm sorry that pressing engagements prevent us from being home to receive your surprise party, and its honorable posse comitatus.

[*Exit, closing the trap-door.*]

Enter AGNES, running.

Those wicked men, what mean they? They have slain
Our servants, and with horrid oaths and cries
Are seeking us. Cæcilia! she's not here.

Yet scarce an hour I left her. What has happened?

Blood, too! Sweet Saviour, grant it be not hers.

(*Discovers stains where VALERIAN'S wounds had been dripping.*)

(*Calls.*) Cæcilia! sister!

Enter ALMACHIUS, with Guards.

Almachius.

We've run down the game.

Here's one, (*seizing her,*) the rest is not far off. Away,
Ye knaves, and leave no nook unsearched—away!

[*Exit Guards.*]

Answer me, child, thy mistress where is she?

Agnes. (*Aside.*) Thank Heaven, they have not found
her. (*Aloud.*) I know not.

Valerian and her. Lose no time, I'll tell
Thee more anon. Secure this child; they ne'er
Can leave without her.

Almachius. To the scent, my hounds,
You'll feed my lampreys if you find it not.
Let two support Septimius to the house.
Bind this child's arms and leave her here: she's safe.
Away! hunt down the game—the spoil is yours.

[*Exeunt omnes, except AGNES, who is left lying on the ground.*]

The trap-door opens softly, and NIGER's head appears.

Niger. A precious set of cut-throats. It's lucky I stopped to listen or this poor child was lost. Now to get her out of the hands of the Philistines. (*Gets out of the opening, and lifting AGNES in his arms carries her to the passage.*) Don't be afraid, my little bird, I'm only removing you out of reach of the vulture's claws. Oh, how I'd like to see the countenances of the Prefect and his brother in villainy when they find how they have been bamboozled. Won't they swear some? [*Exit, closing trap-door.*]

Enter ALMACHIUS and Guards.

Almachius. Perdition! where's the child?

One of the Guards. We left her here
As thou commandest.

Almachius. Gone too!

Guard. She was here
A moment since.

Almachius. Those Nazarenes must have
Some magic pow'rs. Hast found the others yet?

Guard. There cannot be a nook but we have searched
And found no trace.

Almachius. Your worthless carcasses
Shall in my ponds be cast to feed my fish.

Enter SEPTIMIUS, hastily, staggering with weakness.

Sept. What's this I hear? My prey escaped, revenge
Denied me, curses on ye, knaves, and thou
False Prefect! not a clue or victim left!
Is this thy promise! this thy friendship sworn,
Fool that I was to trust such bungling knaves.

Almachius. By Hades! thou hadst better curb thy
speech,
I may forget old ties and claims. Beware!

Sept. Eureka! I have still a clue: there's one
Who can and will unearth them. Decius, who
Is Christian but in name. He's bound to us
By his unconquerable gambling bent;
He'd lose his soul and body for the dice,
And will assist me. [Exit SEPT.]

Almachius. Hence, ye graceless knaves,
But fire this Christian nest first. I have faith
In our success yet, for no blood-hound e'er
Tracked prey more perseveringly or with
The thirst for blood Septimius tracks his foe.
[Excunt omnes]

ACT II.

SCENE I.—A CHAMBER IN THE CATACOMBS.

QUINTILIAN, ATHANASIUS, TIBURTIUS, VALERIAN, CÆCILIA,
and a crowd of Christians. URBAN on his throne. DECIUS,
a prisoner. Two men beside him as Guards.

Urban. Can such a wretch, nay Judas, dwell among us
As thou describest, Athanasius? One
Who sought us when cast out of Rome a leper.
A loathsome object, yet we tended him
With care and love and brought him back to life.
Grant Heav'n thou art mistaken, and he's not
Yet fallen in the hands of Satan or
His emissaries, gamblers. Can it be?
I shudder at such turpitude; could not
The thought of Hell's abyss from which God drew
Thy soul, restrain thee, Decius?

Decius. Was I brought
Before thee but to hear a homily?
Proceed, and let me be confronted with
This meddling knave who dares accuse me: when
Condemned 'tis time to preach.

Urban My son, I grieve
To find thy language bears him out. Proceed,
And let the faithful, Athanasius, hear
Thy story.

Athanasius. Brethren, last night I was sent,
As usual, to the city for our food.

Near Trajan's column I was passing, when
A party of young profligates passed by,
Singing their impious, Bacchanalian songs.
Among them was our brother Decius, he
The noisiest, most dissipated there.

Decius. Thou liest, knave !

Athan. Surprised and shocked, I stood
For some time still, then followed unobserved,
To try and draw him from them. Soon they reached
A gambling rendezvous, and entered. I
Remained till Decius left, resolved to try
Persuasion with him, and thus win him back,
If possible, to God and grace. He left
In company with one Septimius, who
Ranks first in Rome as villian.

Decius. Were he here,
Thou wouldst not dare accost him so. Go on.

Athan. Some stray words of their conversation reached
My ear, and as they hinted some dark plot
Against our Holy Father, I resolved
To play eavesdropper in such righteous cause.
Behind a pillar couched, I heard their plot,
So foul that in it death to us was least.

Decius. Thy proofs, thou lying hypocrite ! produce.

Athan. (*Producing a roll of papyrus.*) This scroll of
thine is proof enough, I ween.

Decius. (*Endeavoring to snatch it from him.*) Confusion !
'tis my property ; what right
Hast thou to keep it ?

Athan. (*Handing it to Urban.*) Holy Father, here
I place this proof in thy hands : 'tis enough.

Urban. (*Unrolling it.*) What's here ? A map, too accurate, alas !

Of this retreat and all its avenues.

Below, the signature of Decius to

A deed of payment for a gambling debt.

Great God ! What payment ! in our blood. Attend.

(*Reads.*) Decius binds himself to pay Septimius, in consideration of one hundred *sestertia* lost by him at the *duodecim scriptæ*, this map, the safe delivery into his hands of Cæcilia, the daughter of Quintilian, and the blood of Urban, the arch Nazarene, with all his outlawed gang——

My son, I'll not reproach thee, but entreat
Thee to repentance ; there's the path of sorrow,
'Twill lead thee back to Heaven ; spurn it not,
But here confess thy sin, we'll pray for thee.

Decius. Enough ! this farce of Piety doth sicken.
I'll have no more of it, if yon smooth knave
Can thus malign me, forge my name, and show
Such document as mine.

Urban. Alas ! my child,
Thou'rt bound to Lucifer too strong for grace
To melt thy soul. I must pronounce on thee
The sentence that will cast thee from the fold
Of Christ. Again, I call thee to repentance.

Decius. Go on, I've ta'en my course, and care not whither
It leads.

Urban. Then from the fold of Christ and all

Communication with the faithful, or
 Participation with them in the grace
 Of sacraments and sacrifice to God,
 I, representative of Him on earth,
 In virtue of the power of the keys,
 Do excommunicate thee, Decius. And
 If any Christian dares revoke this edict
 Pronounced here, let him be anathema.
 Away, lost sheep, thou hast a hideous blight
 Upon thee ; leave this fold of mercy. Go !
 Defile not these pure lambs with thy curs'd presence.

CHORUS OF DEMONS.

Merrily, merrily, sing we fiends,
 Another soul is ours :
 Then welcome him to Hell's dark scenes,
 And the Pandemonian bow'rs.

He's cast away from Heav'n and Grace,
 In the fold of Christ he has no place,
 In Heaven no advocate ;
 We must prepare a throne for him
 Of fire Tartarean, where each limb
 Shall broil on its chair of state. .
 No time or rest we'll grant him there,
 But he'll drink of our Stygian wine so rare
 And his thirst shall never abate.

Ha ! ha ! ha ! Ha ! ha ! ha ! laugh we fiends,
 Another soul is won ;
 Prepare his couch, ye merry fiends,
 For our work, our work is done.

*(All shrink away in horror from DECIUS. He turns to each
 in vain to receive him.)*

Decius. By Hades ! then I'll have revenge on all—
 Ye cursed Nazarenes. I'll hence to Rome,
 And bring Almachius on ye. Yes, that scroll
 Shall be receipted, and those chambers run
 Knee deep in your vile blood : thy hoary head,
 Proud Urban, shall be levelled to the dust.
 Farewell, kind Christians, I'll be here anon.
 Friend Athanasius, it were better far
 Thou ne'er were born than to have roused my ire.

[*Exit DECIVS.*

Athan. May God protect his servants in the hour
 Of trial.

Urban Brethren, we must leave this place
 At once, and meet to-night within the church
 Beneath the Fountains. Decius knows it not ;
 But Athanasius will conduct you thither.
 Retire with him, there's no time now to spare.
 Quintilian, stay—thy daughter too. I've much
 To question thee on late events.

[*Exeunt omnes, except URBAN, QUINT., and CÆCILIA.*

Quint. What peace
 And joy now fills my heart, the dark void's gone,
 Rome's noblest senator, I was a child
 Groping in helplessness and outer darkness.
 Now, Holy Father, thy instructive words
 With Faith, unroll a panorama bright
 Beyond this dark and dreary world.

Urban. 'Tis naught
 To what sweet visions will o'erflow thy soul
 To-night when thy probation's o'er, and grace

Shall with the waters of regeneration
 Be poured upon thy head. I will receive
 Thee and thy friends whom thou hast brought to-night
 Into the bosom of the Church. (*Cæcilia weeps.*) How now,
 Good child, Cæcilia, tender lamb of Christ,
 Why weepest thou on such occasion, when
 Thou seest thy long and patient faith rewarded?
 Why is thy face so blanched? That look of care
 And grief, whence comes it?

Cæcilia. Holy Father, I
 Have lost my tender lamb, my Agnes.

Quint. What!
 Came she not with ye?

Cæcilia. Alas! the time was short, the enemy come,
 We missed her when we reached the cave; with her
 We also missed old Niger, who descended
 The passage with us: he went back, we think,
 To rescue her. Valerian ventured too
 To leave our dark asylum, but no trace
 Of either could he find. One of our slaves
 Who had survived the massacre, denied
 That she or Niger fell a victim to
 The cruel Almachius: she was taken first,
 But rescued quite mysteriously. Alas!
 I fear the dove is in the fowler's hands.

Urban. Have confidence, my child, God will not leave
 Her in the spoiler's meshes long: be calm
 And pray to Him for aid in thy distress.
 Perhaps some strange protector interposed
 Between thy Agnes and the grasp of Death.

Thou knowest how inscrutable the ways
Of God are.

Cæcilia. Thanks, dear father, for those words
Of hope and life; they lift me from the depths
Of sorrow.

Urban. Cheer thy heart then; so to-night,
Quintilian, thou shalt, with thy friends, receive
The waters of true life; now follow me,
We'll deck the Fountain Church in bright attire,
And make its subterranean aisles resound
With hymns of joy. Let's hence, the time is short!

[*Exeunt.*]

SCENE II.—A RUINED MAUSOLEUM—A TRAP-DOOR,
SHOWING THE ENTRANCE TO THE CHURCH OF THE
CATACOMBS—VIEW OF TOMBS, PALM GROVES, &c., AT
THE BACK.

*Enter NIGER, leading AGNES by the hand. He sits on a broken
slab of marble.*

We'll rest awhile, my little dove, and thou canst re-
fresh thy eyes and limbs with slumber on this mossy
couch, while I act as sentinel.

Agnes. But, dear Niger, when shall we see my Cæcilia?

Niger. Shortly, child; rest thyself here, and I'll search
for the entrance to her retreat. (*AGNES goes behind a tomb,
and stretches herself on the ground. NIGER throws his cloak over
her.*)

Niger. Dear Niger! good Niger! better Niger! best
Niger! that's a nice way I'm compared. There's their

manner of addressing me, just as if there was a particle of goodness or dearness about this dusky form. Not a bit of it. I cannot account for the extraordinary feeling with which this child inspires me. Why, she can lead me whither she pleases, and in her presence I feel my breast glowing with new and tender emotions of love and respect. Why, you'll laugh, I know, when I tell it—I actually cried when I witnessed her grief for Cæcilia. At least some drops of liquid fell from my eyes, perhaps they were cobwebs. How on earth could I have missed Valerian and Cæcilia in that Tartarean passage? There must have been two corridors leading from the cave, and each of us took a different one. It was so confounded dark I could only grope my way. The managers of that underground railroad should have more light in their tunnel. Those underground railroads are great institutions. They remind me of a little story I heard once in my native Numidia. You needn't laugh at it, as there's no joke attached to it. I always keep my stories and my jokes apart, as they spoil each other. But for the story: Once upon a time, in the days of old Masanissa, near the city of Cirta, there lived a camel driver. Camels and dromedaries, you know, are the only *locomotives* we have in the desert. This camel driver was a queer genius, quite original and sarcastic. One day he was returning on his camel from Sitifis, when he met old Masanissa, who was on his way to Scipio's camp. "Whither now, good Culbi?" said the King. "To Rome, sire," replied the camel engineer. "To Rome, knave; which is thy path thither?" inquired the prince. "It's a Masanissian or underground one," answered Culbi. The King winced at that, for he was fighting against his own country for the Romans, and he at once effected a change

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of base from Culbi's tongue. That is a railroad story. Now for a *rale* splitting joke, as an Hibernian barbarian, whom I met in Gaul, used to term it. This individual was clad in the skins of a wild beast named "corduroy," and carried in his mouth a fiery Fetish which he called "dhudeen." His name was Patricius Avickensis, and used to keep our camp-fire circle in a roar of laughter all the time. But hush!—some one approaches; he may not be a friend, so I will conceal myself. I wish to goodness I had that Hibernian here; he was a trump at getting himself out of a scrape, or any of his friends either. It was he gave me my club, which he called "shillelagh." Hush! I'll watch this interloper, for he's not a Christian. (*Sinks down behind a tomb.*)

Enter SEPTIMIUS.

Sept. What, still at fault? Cæcilia yet unfound.
Nemesis, aid my search; what demon could
Have thwarted me? Oh, how Almachius raged
Last even when, with Decius as our guide,
We burst a passage through the Christian den,
Without discovering one.

Niger. (*Aside.*) Poor fellow, how
I sympathize with you.

Sept. I still have hope
In Decius, he's one after my own heart.

Niger. He must be Satan then. A No. 1 knave,

Enter DECIVS.

Decius. Septimius, good! I've found a clue, and here
Their nest must be.

Sept.
My Decius, tell me all.

Io triumphe! thanks,

Decius. I tracked to-day
The steps of Athanasius here, and saw
Him enter by a secret passage. Ha!
(*Lifting the trap-door.*) 'Tis here, by Hades! watch, Septi-
mius, close,
Almachius is not far, I'll hie to him,
And bring him hither with his blood-hounds. Joy,
The demons favor me. [*Exit DECIVS.*

Sept. (Searching around.) I knew he'd scent
And ferret out the hares. Cæcilia's there!
How exquisite my hate; how dull those plans
Of vengeance which I first conceived to vow.

(*Discovers AGNES asleep, raises the cloak from her face.*
NIGER steals behind.)

Her baby sister, good, she's left her here,
And will return for her ere long. I'll stab
Her as she sleeps. (*Draws his dagger and raises it over her.*)
One blow to send the brat
To meet her God and rend her sister's heart.

(*NIGER stabs him behind. He staggers back and falls with
a cry.*)

Niger. There's two that have a say in that, friend Sep-
timius. I'd rather you would cut me to pieces than injure
a hair of that darling's head.

Enter CÆCILIA.

Cæcilia. I heard a cry of agony here. Heaven grant
the enemy be not within our fold. What's here? A man

lying at the point of death. Good Heavens! 'tis our worst foe, Septimius.

Niger. He'll never do thee injury again.

Cæcilia. Niger! thanks, sweet Saviour. Where's my Agnes?

Niger. Safe. Behold! (*Lifts the cloak. AGNES wakes and springs into her arms.*)

Cæcilia. My little lamb, thou knowest not what anxious hours I have spent since I missed thee.

Agnes. Dear Cæcilia, we shall part no more. I thought the hour of meeting would never come.

(*SEPTIMIUS rises himself with difficulty on his elbow, faintly calling*): Water! water! (*CÆCILIA takes a gourd lying on the tomb and runs out.*)

Niger. Well I declare, if she hasn't gone for water for this crushed viper, which would have stung her to death. Some women are incomprehensible, but she's the incomprehensiblest I ever met. (*CÆCILIA returns with water.*)

Cæcilia. Quick, good Niger, raise his head on your knee. We must try and revive him first and then attend to his wound.

Niger. Perhaps, my lady, your eyesight is not good. This is Septimius, of whose zeal in your welfare you've had plenty of proofs.

Cæcilia. No matter. Our religion is one of forgiveness. Why didst thou give way thus to revenge, Niger, and slay thy brother mortal?

Niger. He my brother ? I know I'm not possessed of even a particle of goodness, and bear the reputation of being a hard nut, but certainly I would not remain one hour in existence, if I thought I belonged to the same family as the gambler, Septimius.

Cæcilia. Christ died for all alike. Assist me, worthy friend.

Niger. That last name's a settler : I must obey.

(Raises the head of SEPTIMIUS on his knee. CÆCILIA moistens the lips and brow of the sufferer. He slowly revives.)

Sept. Where am I ? What is this that drags me down,
As with an iron hand, to Hades ?

Cæcilia. Death !
Septimius ; think of God. I'll pray for thee ;
Thou shalt find mercy if thou ask it.

Sept. What !
Cæcilia, whom I doomed to worse than death,
And tracked with blood-hound scent, she, pray for me ?
Oh ! this is worse than Tartarus.

Cæcilia. Be calm,
I pray thee : we'll bind up thy wounds.

Sept. Too late !
I'm sped ! thy words fall on my ear like fire ;
But mercy or repentance are not sent
To such as me. Away, or curse me, Ate !

Cæcilia. Mercy is for the sinner. In the blood

That flowed from Calvary's tree the blackest sins
 And foulest crimes are washed away ; the soul,
 Long seared by guilt, is made as white as snow.
 Breathe but one pray'r, Septimius, and thou'rt saved.
 I'd gladly give my life for thine, if thus
 Thy soul were God's.

Sept. Cæcilia, thou hast poured
 A stream of lava on my head. I thought
 Of vengeance only, but of mercy now.
 Thou and thy race are doomed ; the Prefect's guards
 Are here anon, with Decius as their guide.
 Fly, fly, or thou art lost. Oh ! God, my crimes
 Rise up in judgment 'gainst me : there's no hope
 For such a fiend as I have been.

Cæcilia. Look up,
 And pray to Him, the refuge of all sinners ;
 Who sweetly beckons thee to Grace.

Sept. Alas !
 There was a time when I, a child, oft knelt
 Beside my sainted Christian mother, when
 No fierce, wild passions rent my breast or drove
 Me headlong into crime.

Cæcilia. Oh, let the mem'ry
 Of those blest days recall thy soul from sin.

Sept. I see her now in thee, as oft she knelt
 In agony at my feet, her streaming eyes
 And feeble hands clasped on her breast : she knelt
 To me, her child, I spurned her, and she died.
 Oh, Hades ! how that pale face haunts me now.

Cæcilia. Think only of her love, she smiles on thee
From her high throne in Heav'n.

Sept. Thy words are life,
Cæcilia, falling on my heart like balm.
They melt the granite of my breast. I feel
A strange wild hope spring up there. Pray for me,
Wronged lady, God cannot reject thy prayer.

Cæcilia. May He forgive thee, call thee to Himself,
And make thee child of grace again in Heaven.

Sept. Let me but touch thy hand before I die ;
Thy touch repels those hissing fiends that strive
To drag me down to them. Have mercy, Lord,
I call upon Thee in this hour of death.
The demon's vanquished ; angels smile on me,
And mother stretches forth her arms—I come ! *Dies.*

Cæcilia. Another soul is gone to God. Oh joy !
Now to acquaint our friends of Decius' snare.
Niger, remain here with my Agnes, till
I warn our brethren of the enemy.

Niger. Nō time to lose. Conceal thyself and wait
With Agnes here while I descend.

Cæcilia. Remain.
Thou knowest not that labyrinthine cave,
Look round for some asylum while I'm gone,
And guard my little sister.

Agnes. (*Running to her.*) Do not leave
Thy Agnes, we may never meet again.

Cæcilia. All things are in the hands of God ; I will,

If He permit, once more return to thee.
 If not, we'll meet in Heaven ne'er to part.

(Kisses AGNES and descends by the trap-door.)

Niger. We'll hide behind this tomb, my little dove,
 Until thy sister comes! Fear not, no harm
 Shall e'er befall thee while there's life and strength
 In this right arm. *(Clash of arms heard.)*
 They're here! Down, child, at once;
 They'd drink thy blood like hungry wolves.

*(Sinks down behind a tomb, holding AGNES with one hand
 by the arm, the other raised to his lips in an attitude of
 warning and attention.)*

Enter ALMACHIUS and DECIUS, with Guards.

Almachius. *(Seeing the body of SEPTIMIUS.)* What's this?
 My bold Septimius sped! Revenge, my hounds,
 Those cursed Nazarenes have slain our comrade.
 Now for their dark concealment.

Decius. *(Lifting up the trap-door.)* Here's the entrance,
 Descend and we shall cage them. Hark!

*(The strains of the organ and voices in harmony are heard
 issuing from the subterranean Church.)*

Decius. 'Tis well.
 We've run them down; I'll reconnoitre first.
 Remain 'till I return. *(Descends.)*

Almachius. Septimius gone!
 His was a daring spirit, one I thought
 Would yet be first in Rome, an iron will
 That bent all to its dictates; cunning mind,
 Fertile in plots, say whither hast thou gone? *(Attempts
 to lift the body.)*

That lithe and wiry frame is stiff and cold,
 The arm that dealt full many a stroke of death
 Hangs nerveless now. Thy death shall be avenged,
 Thy manes haunt no more the Stygian banks,
 And Christian blood shall flow for thine.

(DECIVS *appears at the trap-door and calls*): Come on,
 The feast of blood is ready; they're all here;
 Give me thy axe, friend, this slight sword can't do
 The work of death half quick enough.

(*One of the Guards hands him an axe.*) Descend,
 My comrades, hew the wretches down; blood-hounds,
 Fasten your fangs in Christian throats, and glut
 Yourselves in blood. Descend. (*The Guards descend one by one.*)

Almachius. (*The organ strains again heard.*) Cæcilia spare,
 And bring her prisoner with you; she shall writhe
 In tortures worse than death or sacrifice
 To Rome's gods. On! I follow! hew them down!

(*The last of the Guards having descended, ALMACHIUS follows. NIGER rises.*)

Niger. Heaven help our friends! they're doomed beyond
 relief:
 Let's fly at once.

Agnes. (*Advancing towards the trap-door.*) I'll die with
 my Cæcilia!
 I've not a friend who loves me when she's gone.

Niger. No friend? I'll be thy friend and father. Come,
 My life shall be devoted to thy care,
 Thou'lt teach me goodness; this right arm shall shield
 Thee from all foes. With thee my heart shall know

The father's bliss, and thy sweet presence shall
Reclaim me from my wicked life. Hark! Now

(Noise and uproar below. Clash of arms and cries heard.)

The carnival of Death begins. Let's hence! [*Exeunt.*]

SCENE III.—THE CHURCH OF THE CATACOMBS.

GRAND TABLEAU. MASSACRE OF THE CHRISTIANS.

At the back of the stage, an altar, with lights, ornaments, &c. Christians and soldiers in different attitudes. Urban, with his hands stretched out in the act of bestowing his benediction, is sinking back with an arrow sticking in his breast. One of the soldiers stands near the foot-lights with a bow in his hand, having just discharged the arrow at Urban. Almachius stands in the centre, with his arms folded, a smile of triumph on his face. Decius has his axe raised over the bent and kneeling form of Athanasius. Tiburtius and Quintilian are lying on the ground, the former endeavoring in vain to rise. Valerian stands over their bodies, sword in hand, protecting Cæcilia, who is supporting her dead father's head in her lap. Two of the Guards are attacking him with lance and axe, while a third at the farthest corner of the stage is drawing an arrow on him. The other groups may be arranged according to the fancy of the stage manager. A large doll, representing an infant, might be in the hands of one of the guards, who has seized it by the leg, and is about to dash out its brains. The mother kneels at his feet, stretching forth her hands for her babe. The foot-lights should be all lowered or extinguished, and the scene well illuminated with red fire.

ACT III.

SCENE I.—THE PREFECT'S TRIBUNAL.

ALMACHIUS *on his judgment seat, surrounded by Guards, Citizens, &c., &c.* At one side a statue of a heathen deity, with incense burning before it. CÆCILIA, with her hands bound, stands before the Prefect; behind him, DECIUS, and near the statue, EGERIA.

Almachius. Rash girl! why brave my wrath? Hast
thou not seen
And felt the consequences?

Cæcilia. Yes, I've seen
The links that bound me to this cold world severed,
Husband and father, brother, friend. What more
Of love or hope remains, when they are gone?
What is there in this dark life to regret
At Death's glad summons? Longing for the hour
Of blest reunion; prayed I to my God,
And He rejected not His virgin's prayer.
Plunged in a fiery bath, I felt the air
Around me soft as Syria's breeze, and came
His angels with sweet consolations laden.
Amid the darkness of the Mamertine,
Three days immured in loathsome dungeons, where
The damp floor, oozing fetid exhalations,
Was all my couch, there have I tasted bliss,
And that unhallowed cell seemed Paradise.
I've seen in glory clad, 'mid myriad shapes
Of light celestial, my Valerian. Oh!
How brightly shone that noble countenance.

E'en when on earth it mirrored forth a soul,
 That breathed naught but honor, love, and truth.
 And oh ! to see it lighted with Heaven's beams,
 And tenderness for his lone spouse ; the sight
 Were worth a Purgatory. I had eyes
 For him alone 'mid that bright host that came
 To comfort me. Sweet Saviour, pardon me,
 If this heart dwell too much on him, my lost one.
 Lost ? No, he's gone before me to prepare
 A place among the mansions of the blest
 For his Cæcilia, where eternally
 We'll sing the praises of the mighty Triune.
 They told me on my way from Mamertine,
 I was three days immured there, yet it seemed
 With that bright vision but a moment's space.
 Soft strains of liquid harmony still bear
 My soul in billowy sweetness up to God,
 On the wide Ocean of Divine Love.

Almach.

Cease !

This insane folly, girl, will not avail
 To shield thee from my vengeance. Think
 On life and all its pleasures. Thou art young,
 And fair, and Plutus' child.

Cæcilia.

Yes, Plutus' love,

That sordid, base, degraded love for wealth,
 Is all that's left me when Valerian's gone.
 Cæcilia, wealthy, Roman dame, fair prey
 For fortune-hunters, Plutus-loved ? Go on.

Almach: Mar not thy fair face with the cynic's sneer.
 Thou'rt young and rich, what more in life wilt thou ?
 I can add honors, ay ! imperial too.

Thou knowest my meaning. Come, forsake this low,
Degraded faith of thine, and turn to those
Proud gods of Rome, that made her what she is.

Cæcilia. Proud gods? Those types of human wickedness,
Ye clothe with attributes which e'en in Rome
No man dare practice with impunity.
Nay more, not one community on earth,
Barbarian or civilized, would suffer
Such shameless miscreants to live an hour
Unpunished 'mong them, but would hurl at once
As unclean things and monsters from their midst,
Men guilty of a tithe of those foul crimes
Related of Rome's gods.

Almach. Be silent, wretch!
Thy daring insolence is past endurance;
Septimius spoke but truly when he said,
Thou hadst thy father's stubborn spirit. Come,
Thou sacrificest on yon shrine at once,
Or——

Decius. Give her up to me if she refuses.
I long to try those tests of Nazarenes
Within thy torture chamber. Still the fiend
Imprisoned in my breast cries out for blood;
He entered with the curse of Urban, and
Ever revives to rack my breast with fire.

Almach. Thou hearest, girl; decide, thy time is short.

Cæcilia. I have decided. God will grant me strength,
And bear me through the ordeal.

Almach. Then, thou'rt doomed.

Away with her, my Decius, to the torture,
And let th' insulted gods have vengeance.

Cæcilia.

Hold !

Yon outcast from the fold of Christ cannot
Lay hands upon a Christian maiden. Let
Thy guards conduct me.

Decius.

Braved, by Hades ! now,
Weak, puny creature, thou hast roused the fiend
That slumbered since the feast of blood.

Cæcilia.

Beware !

Unhappy outcast, lest that fiend be struck
With lightning vengeance, and thou perish with him.
The sentence of God's Vicar, avalanche-like,
May crush thee if thou dar'st lay hands on one
Of His dear lambs, for though that shepherd's slain,
His flock dispersed, yet there is One above
Who said : " I'm with you all days." He will guard
The humblest of that flock from thee, apostate.

Decius. I here defy Him, dare Him do His worst,
And seize thee in despite.

*(Placing his hand on CÆCILIA'S shoulder, she shrinks
away, and extends her bound hands towards him.
He staggers back, with a loud cry.)*

Cæcilia.

Unhappy man !

Thy doom is sealed.

Decius.

I burn ! help ! fire ! my breast
Is Phlegethon. Oh, save me from this fiend
That clutches at my throat. Oh God ! the air
Is peopled with dark clouds of laughing demons.

They circle round me in a horrid dance.
 What scene is that they point to? 'Tis the Church,
 With Urban and his fellow-victims. See!
 The ground is opening 'neath my feet. Oh! mercy,
 Release my limbs, those serpents twine around them.
 Ha! one is gnawing at my breast; 'tis he
 The worm of conscience. Mercy! Spare me, fiends.
 I'm sinking down—the circle's closing. Off!
 A hand of fire is on my throat; a voice
 Is hissing in my ear: "Thou'rt mine! thou'rt mine!"

(Falls dead on the steps of the Tribunal.)

Almach. Away with her to instant execution!
 She's leagued with Furies. Hence with her at once!
 What! shrink ye, varlets, from a feeble woman?

Cæcilia. Lead on! I follow cheerfully to death
 That opens for me the gates of Life and bliss.

Egeria. (*Rushing forward, and throwing herself at CÆCILIA'S feet.*) Depart not, lady, ere thou grantest me
 Forgiveness. I'm that wretch who sought thy life,
 And, with Septimius, leagued against thy honor.
 Thou'rt worthy of Valerian, worthier far
 His spouse to be than I, degraded one.
 For his sake, oh! forgive me; tell me how
 Thy God, dear lady, I can know, and weep
 O'er my transgressions; if aught hope remain
 For one like me to see Him in His glory.
 If e'en the humblest place in His Elysium,
 Where I could see thee and Valerian happy,
 Can purchased be at any price; if years
 Of penance and humiliations e'er
 Can buy it?

Cæcilia. Dear Egeria, God has heard
My earnest prayer, and moves thy heart to grace.
May He now grant thee light to know Him. Come,
Dear sister, I will teach thee on my way
To Him and bliss, some truths of life and hope.

Almach. What's this, Egeria? Christian too, thou'rt
mad!

Away, and leave her to her fate, or thou
Shalt share it with her. Hence! thou knowest me well.

Egeria. As one who wears the human form as veil
For heart so hideous that unveiled, 'twould stiffen,
Medusa-like, the unwary eye to stone.
Send me to die with her? Oh, priceless boon;
Yet, ah! perhaps we'd part to meet no more;
I am unworthy to accompany her
To bliss. Would not Valerian shrink from one
So lost and wicked?

Cæcilia. Nay, dear sister, fear not.
There's naught but joy in that blest home, yet stay—
Dost thou believe in one God only. He,
Th' eternal, glorious Triune?

Egeria. I believe.

Cæcilia. Believest thou that He, the Word, descended
From His bright throne to die for fallen man,
Opening the gates of Heaven?

Egeria. I believe.

Cæcilia. Believest thou each doctrine of His Church,
That monument imperishable, left
As beacon on Life's ocean?

Egeria.

I believe.

May He supply my faith with light to know them.

Cæcilia. (Embracing her.) Then welcome, sister, to the fold of Life.

Almach. (Aside.) Astonishment deprives me of all speech,

I've gone too far, however, to recede.

(Aloud.) I've listened to these rhapsodies too long.

Here each shall offer incense on this shrine

And here renounce those Christian follies.

Cæcilia and Egeria.

Never!

Almach. Then die! and thou, Egeria, shalt be first
To feel my vengeance. Guards, away with them!
We'll see if tortures cannot tame their spirits.

Cæcilia. Dear neophyte of Heaven, let us go;
This ordeal's sent to purify our souls,
And fit them for the mansions of the blest.

[*The Scene closes as they are leaving the Hall.*]

SCENE II.—THE TORTURE CHAMBER.

Instruments of torture lying around. The rack on one side, and EGERIA's body lying on a bench, covered with a cloak, beside it. CÆCILIA kneeling beside the corse. ALMACHIUS, Guards, and Executioners standing around the rack. At the farthest corner, the headsman, with a black mask, is leaning on his axe, which rests against the block.

Almachius. Can nothing move thee? Look on yonder corse,

The shattered form of Rome's proud beauty. Wilt thou
 Contemn my threats, reject my offers, when
 Her couch of torture's ready? Seest thou not
 Those loops, that wheel, those rollers?

Cæcilia. (*Bending over the body.*) Sister dear,
 Baptized in blood, Valerian welcomes thee.
 Tell him the hour of blest reunion's near.
 The tender voice of Him, that died for man,
 Is thrilling every chord of this fond heart:
 "Arise, my love, my dove, my fairest one,
 The winter's past; the spring has come, arise."

Almach. (*Aside.*) Her spirit is unconquerable; yet
 I cannot spare her, mercy comes too late,
 My mind misgives me; Alexander's eye
 Seems ever and anon to blaze on me.
 Should that report that told his death prove false,
 And those assassins whom I trusted fail,
 My life were forfeited on his return.
 What fearful retribution he'd exact
 I dare not contemplate; but this is folly,
 Thou'rt safe, Almachius, never Syrian steel
 Has failed yet. Out upon those idle fears.
 (*Aloud.*) The headsman's ready, girl, I'll spare thy limbs
 The agony of yonder couch, since thou
 Hast suffered in the bath and Mamertine.

(*At a signal from ALMACHIUS, the headsman advances to the side of CÆCILIA, and touching her on the shoulder, points to the block. She crosses over and kneels beside it.*)

Cæcilia. Oh, happy hour! the happiest of my life,
 In which the prison doors of my caged soul

Are opened and I mount to those bright realms
 Of endless bliss. Receive Thy servant, Lord,
 Into Thy hands I render back my soul,
 Look not on my unworthiness ; supply
 It with Thy grace, but hush ! again those strains
 Of Heaven rise upon my ear. That voice,
 'Tis his, Valerian's ; now the vision opens,
 What glorious beings people this dark chamber !
 Its walls seem melting into golden vistas,
 In which each ray of light's an angel. See !
 There's One, who sits in awful majesty,
 Whose face is veiled. The eye of flesh, He says,
 Could not endure the glory of His presence ;
 This flesh and life before one glance from Him
 Would melt as snow, the freed soul springing forth
 To cast, to lose itself in Him. Oh, joy !
 The veil is melting from mine eyes ; my soul
 Is trembling on the eve of its departure.
 Again that voice, " Arise." I come, I come !

(Bends her head on the block.)

CHORUS OF UNSEEN SPIRITS.

Val. Arise, my spouse, the nuptial dress
 Of immortality
 Awaits thee in the realms of bliss
 To wear eternally.

Chorus. Awake ! awake ! the golden gates
 Of Paradise ope wide ;
 And He, thy Heavenly Spouse, awaits
 The coming of the bride.
 Earth's weary pilgrimage is o'er
 And the good fight is won,
 The storm-tost bark nears Heaven's bright shore,

Life's cheerless voyage done.
 Hail! virgin, Heaven welcomes thee,
 In loud and joyous tone,
 Among her saints eternally
 To sit upon thy throne. *(A pause.)*

Almach. (Aside.) Unearthly voices welcome her; my heart

Is chilled with sudden terror. What! Almachius,
 Trembling at airy phantoms, out upon thee!
 Thy safety now demands her death; away,
 Ye hissing monitors within my breast,
 The work of Death must, shall be done, away!
(Aloud to headsman.) Strike, slave, since mercy's lost upon
 her, strike!

(The headsman raises the axe over CÆCILIA'S neck, when a trumpet sounds within; a cheer and shout of "The Emperor! the Emperor!" "Long live ALEXANDER!" is heard, and the emperor, ALEXANDER SEVERUS, clad in armor, with a military cloak thrown over his shoulders, a helmet with a white plume on his head, a sceptre in his hand, and followed by his gigantic lieutenant, HERCULES MAXIMIN, with NIGER and AGNES, rushes into the chamber.)

Alexander. Heaven grant I be not late. Alas! too late.
(To headsman.) Stop, wretch, strike not, this bloody work
 is o'er;
 Blood, blood, by Hades! fills this cursed chamber.
(To Almach.) Down on thy knees, foul wretch, before I
 send

Thy demon spirit down to Tartarus; down!
(ALMACHIUS falls on his knees.)

First raise this victim, there may be life still.

(NIGER and AGNES raise the head of CÆCILIA ; it falls back on AGNES' shoulder.)

Agnes. Speak to me, sister ! speak, thy Agnes calls thee
(Kisses her.)

What deadly chill is this ? Thy brow is cold and pale.
Those lips smile welcome, and those closed eyes seem
To gaze upon some inward vision. Speak !
Thou'rt free.

Niger. Too late ! too late ! her suffering's o'er.

Alex. Summon a leech, there may be hope.

Niger. Alas !

Too late ! too late ! her spirit's flown to God.

(AGNES buries her head on CÆCILIA'S breast in an agony of grief.)

Alex. I'd gladly give Rome's fairest province if
Her life could thus be spared ; but this fiend's work
Was done too surely. Come, her obsequies
Shall equal her high worth, but first for justice.
Thou need'st to tremble, traitor, for thy fate
Shall be a traitor's. Thank my clemency
That thou'rt not placed on yonder rack ; but what !
Another victim lies beside it. Ah ! (Discovering EGERIA'S
corse.)

Egeria ! she, the fairest of the fair,
Marked for my bride on my return. Ye gods !
Had ye no lightnings swift for this foul scourge,
That dared deface the masterpiece of Nature ?
Speak, fiend, what Fury urged thee to this crime ?

Almach. My zeal for thee.

Alex. Beware of jesting now,
Associate me with thy tiger spirit,
And call it zeal? Thou mockest.

Almach (Rising.) -No, mehercle!
I wished to pay divine and solemn honors
To thee, great Cæsar! but those Nazarenes
Refused obedience; braved thee in my person,
And I, to avenge the insult shown to thee,
Consigned them to the executioners.

Alex. Thou shameless hypocrite! I know thee well.
What honors didst thou bid thy hireling cut-throats,
Those Syrians, pay me in my tent? Ha! see,
Thy coward cheek is blanched. I'll tell thee all,
To show how vain thy efforts 'gainst one loved
And guarded by the gods. Thy hirelings came,
And gained admittance to the camp; nay more,
A post of honor near my tent. One night
Their murd'rous, vile attempt was made, but mark,
In all their calculations they forgot
That at my tent door slept a trusty guardian,
My faithful Goth, Maximin; they forgot
His presence, or they'd ne'er have ventured there,
No more than into Hades. I was roused
By clashing steel and groans of dying wretches.
Across the entrance stood my watchdog, while
A torch's glare shone on his iron mace,
Sweeping down death and ruin on the heads
Of thy assassin throng. The fight was o'er
Long ere th' alarm was given in the camp,
For human strength could not withstand those blows.
How many went to Pluto, my Achates?

Maximin. (*In a gruff tone.*) But six; their comrades fled.

Alex. Thou shalt be crowned
As old Dentatus; look around thee here,
Those Syrian guards, what thinkest thou of them?

Max. (*Raising his iron mace. The Guards shrink back.*)
Assassins, like the rest. Wilt thou that I——
(*Sweeps the mace in a circle over his head.*)

Alex. No; hold thy weapon, these are senseless tools.
Their master we must punish only.

Almach. Mercy?
Make me thy lowest slave, but spare my life.

Alex. Mercy! what mercy hast thou shown thy victims.
The noblest head in Rome, Quintilian's, fell
With brave Tiburtius and Valerian too,
Before thy ruthless steel; a hecatomb
Of victims cry aloud for vengeance on thee.
This trusty slave has told me all, he fled
With this poor child from Rome and thee. I met
Him near Brundisium, and we hastened hither,
Too late to save, but not to punish.

Almach. Spare me.
Some foe has falsely charged me as accomplice
Of those assassins.

Alex. What! thy signet ring,
Thy gold, instructions, what were these? No more.
I could forgive thy treason 'gainst myself,
But those foul murders never.

Almach.
A temple in thy honor and a day
Appointed for thy worship.

I have decked

Alex. Impious knave!
I'm but a mortal, nay, a plain, blunt soldier,
And no Heliogabálus, for I love
To do unto all others as I would
That they should do to me. My Christians e'er
I've found the noblest and most faithful; why
Dar'st thou then lift thy murderous hand against them?
Thy supplications are of no avail,
Justice must have its course.

Almach. (*Drawing a dagger and attempting to stab him.*) Nemesis then!

(*HERCULES MAXIMIN grasps him by the throat, a slight gurgle is heard, he relaxes his fingers, and ALMACHIUS falls back on the stage, strangled and purple in the face.*)

Alex. Drag forth the corse! Maximin's grasp is death.
(*The Guards drag away the body of ALMACHIUS.*)
Now bring two litters hither. (*They bring two litters, draped in black, and place them beside each other in the centre.*) Raise the forms
Of those fair victims tenderly on each.

(*The Guards lift the martyrs' bodies on the litters.*
AGNES sinks on her knees beside CÆCILIA, burying her face in her hands.)

How calm and beautiful in death! Sweet Peace
Rests on the placid features as in sleep,
And gilds them with a halo. Gently with them
To Palatine, and in its richest palace

Set them in state, that every Christian may
 Gaze on those heroines of Faith and Christ.
 And thou, (*embracing* AGNES,) sweet child, wilt thou be
 mine? I'll try
 And make thee happy, though Cæcilia's gone.
 Thou'lt be my child, this heart is warm and loving,
 And every wish of thine will gratify.
 Nay, look not sorrowful, good Niger, thou
 Shalt be her guardian, too; to thee I'll trust
 My little dove if aught should happen me.
 Come, Agnes, grieve not thus for thy dear sister,
 Cæcilia shall receive the funeral rites
 Of her own faith, and Rome shall mourn her loss.
 I'll trust no more those Prefects or their guards
 To take my place while I chastise Rome's foes.
 Those Parthian rebels I consign to thee,
 My faithful Goth; away to Syria's coast,
 And take this sceptre as commission. Tell
 My ga'llant legions I watch o'er them yet,
 In spirit witness to their brave exploits,
 Rewarding merit still with liberal hand,
 Punishing crime relentlessly, and when
 The Parthians swarm around them, let all see
 My white plume on thy helmet, dancing far
 In front amid the battle's surges. Come,
 Our melancholy task remains, my Agnes,
 Let's on to Palatine. We'll there attend
 As mourners. Come, my child, thy father waits thee.

(*The pall bearers take up the biers and advance, when
 the scene opens above at back, showing QUINTILIAN,
 VALERIAN, TIBURTIUS, URBAN, SEPTIMIUS,
 CÆCILIA crowned, EGERIA and the other martyrs
 in a blaze of glory, surrounded by angels. The*

Emperor gazes in astonishment and admiration.
AGNES stretches forth her hands to CÆCILIA.

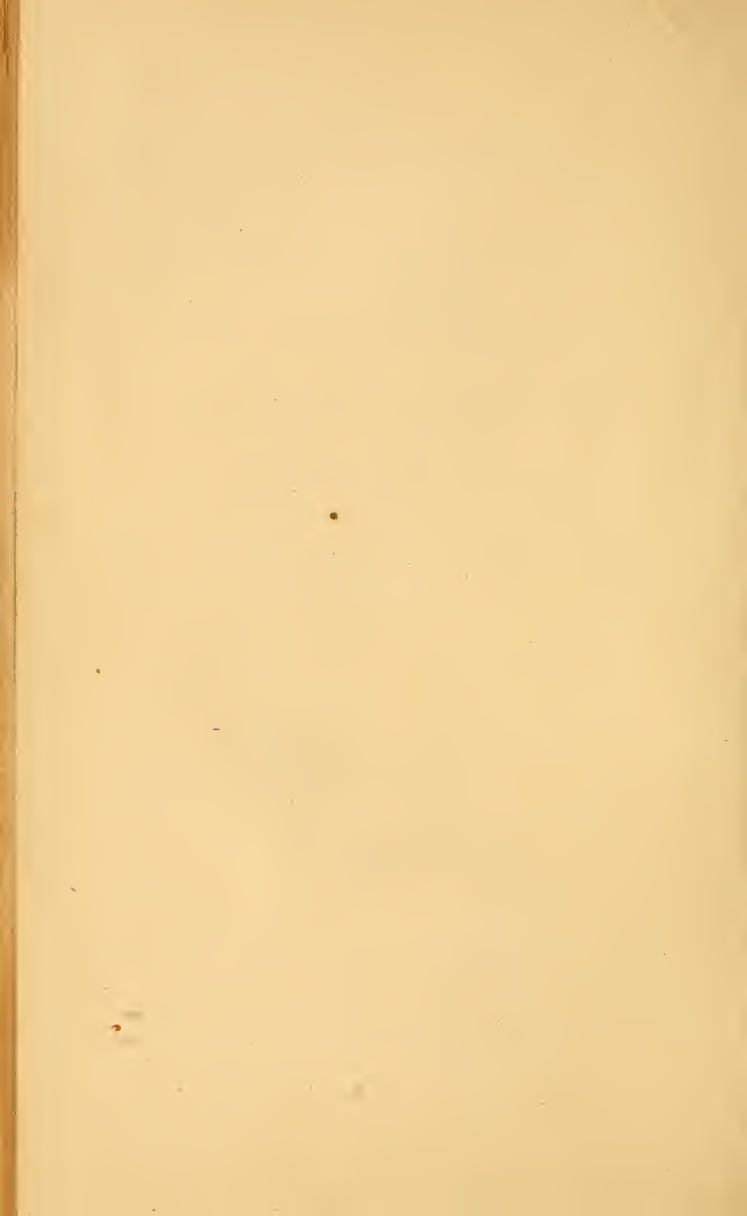
CHORUS OF UNSEEN SPIRITS.

Hail, virgin, Heaven welcomes thee
In loud and joyous tone,
Among her saints eternally
To sit upon thy throne.

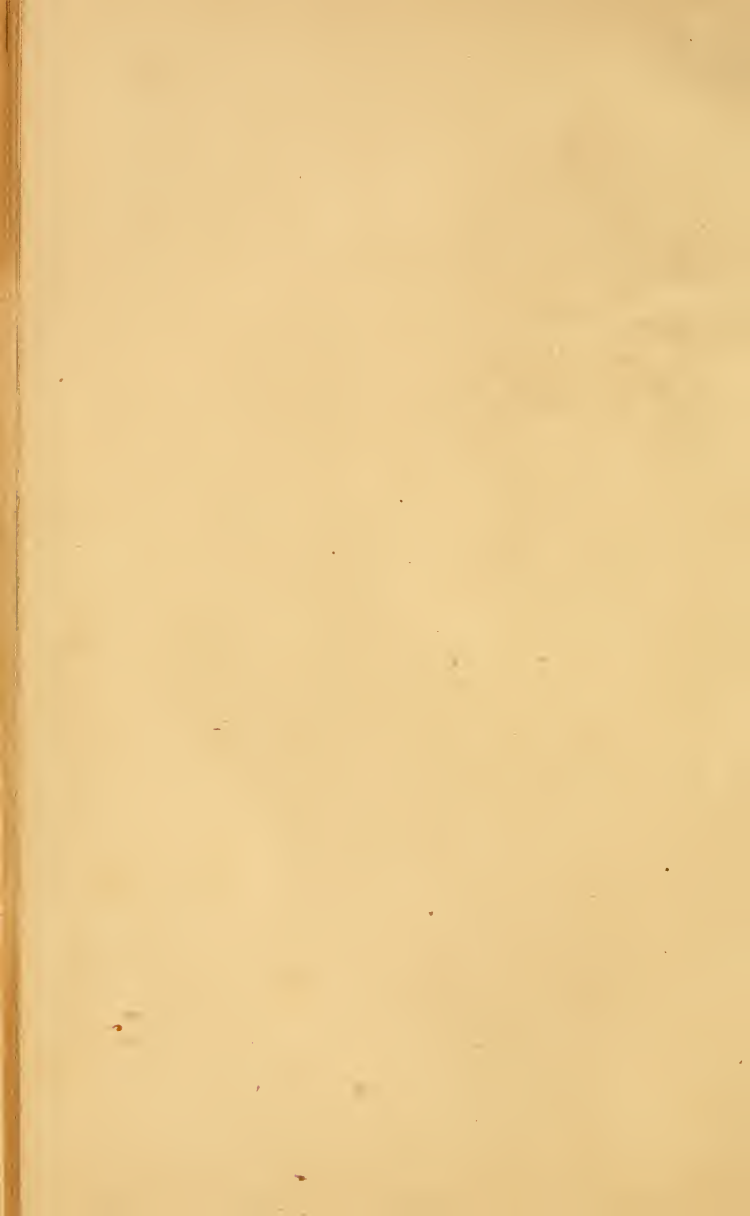
THE SCENE CLOSES UPON THE TABLEAU.

CURTAIN.













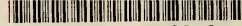












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